



A STUDY OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND POLITENESS PRINCIPLE IN COLLEGE ENGLISH LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract: The teaching goal of College English is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of English application. To develop students' communicative ability in English, their listening and speaking ability should be first developed. However, most students perform rather poorly in listening comprehension. The major factor behind is that non-English majors don't need to learn any related theories which can serve guidance in their listening comprehension. Thus, this paper, based on Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle, tries to study the application of cooperative principle and politeness principle in College English listening comprehension. The result shows that the two principles are quite helpful to enhance students' listening ability.

Index Terms - College English, listening comprehension, Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle

I. INTRODUCTION

Up to now, College English teaching in China has gone through a few rounds of reform, ranging from *College English Teaching Requirements* issued by the Ministry of Education in 2007 to *A Guide to College English Teaching* formulated by experts and scholars of the College English Teaching Steering Committee, all explicitly stating that the teaching goal of College English is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of English application, especially cross-culture communicative awareness and communicative competence. To develop students' communicative ability in English, their listening and speaking ability should be first developed. Moreover, listening and speaking ability is particular paramount in the modern society as international contacts are becoming increasingly frequent in terms of trade, education, business, politics and so on. Thus, CET-4 attaches great importance to listening comprehension which accounts for 35% of the total point.

However, listening comprehension is quite challenging to students who find it very difficult to enhance the listening ability. Most of students who fail CET-4 perform rather poorly in the part of listening comprehension. This is partly due to the fact that students lack in practice and are less exposed to English listening materials. But the main factor behind it is the difference between two cultures. Many educators have proposed different pedagogies and strategies for teaching listening comprehension. Tan, Wang & Peng (2013) believed that the objective of listening teaching and learning is to make the students figure out the explicit communicative intention based on the form and meaning of the language, and figure out the implicit communicative intention based on explicit communicative intention according to different context of situation and context of culture. Therefore, it is necessary and essential for students to understand two different cultures before doing listening comprehension. Hall (1976) maintained that cultural communication generally can be compared on a scale of high to low context and English-speaking culture is a low-context culture where the verbal message contains most of the information, while very little is embedded in the participants' conversational context. Also, the reason why English-speakers value direct and clear expressions is closely connected with the concept of individualism which encourages people to express themselves freely and frankly. In comparison,

Chinese possess a high-context culture. The Halls (1990) noted that in high-context cultures, most of the information lies either in the setting or in the people who engage in conversation and little information is actually contained in the verbal message.

In addition, non-English major in China don't have to learn any theory related to English language learning which includes pragmatics. In order to help them to infer the communicative intention more easily and smoothly, college English teachers should intentionally teach them the relevant theory, such as the cooperative principle (Tang, Wang & Peng, 2013). Grice's Cooperative Principle (shortened as "CP"), and conversational implicature, based on low-context culture, can help students to analyze the connection between the literal and implicit meanings of utterances and in turn infer the conversational meaning of speakers based on the literal meaning, which can enhance students' listening comprehension and even communicative ability.

II Literature Review

H.P. Grice, a British-educated philosopher of language, noticed that in daily conversation people do not usually say things directly but tend to imply them. In his famous paper "Logic and Conversation", Grice (1975) suggests that a basic underlying assumption we make when we speak to one another is that we are trying to cooperate with one another to construct meaningful conversation. He, in turn, formulated his widely-known CP, by which participants in conversation are expected to observe "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at a stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975). In other words, speakers try to deliver meaningful, productive utterances to further the conversation. It then follows that listeners assume that conversational partners are doing the same. Therefore, listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way.

But in actual verbal communication, people don't necessarily follow CP. Instead, they violate Maxims of CP such as deliberately lying, speaking in a roundabout way, and steering clear of the crucial point. There must be some other intention for people to be deliberately violate these Maxims. That is to say, there is a gap between what is literally said and what is implied. This gap is so substantial that we cannot expect a semantic theory to explain how we communicate using language. The notion of implicature, also called "Conversational Implicature", bridges the gap by explaining how meanings are effectively conveyed. In this case, listeners should deduce speakers' true intention from the literal meaning of the conversation, namely, conversational implicature. Only by doing so can verbal communication go on smoothly. According to the theory of Grice, conversational implicature includes generalized implicature and particularized implicature. Generally speaking, students can figure out generalized implicature but it is quite difficult for them to infer the particularized implicature. Therefore, it is quite necessary to guide students to infer the implicature which is different from the literal meaning based on CP and the specific context.

Quite a few Chinese educators and scholars try to apply CP in the College English Teaching. Tang, Wang & Peng (2013) discussed about the use of CP in the listening comprehension of non-English majors, aiming to help students to figure out the communicative intention (especially the implicit communicative intention) of speakers successfully and concluded that consciously using CP in college English listening comprehension could promote the sound development of college English teaching and learning in China. Ke Zhi (2015) in his paper argued that CP, especially Maxim of Relation and Quantity, can help students better understand the context of the conversation. Mai Zhou (2009) maintained that CP will be helpful for people to improve the flexibility and accuracy of language communication and further proved the applicability of CP in spoken English teaching. Chunxia Zhang (2016) also conducted a study on the application of CP in Business English letters and believed that giving detailed introduction about business English letters can make readers have a good understanding about business English letters and improve writing skills in relevant fields.

However, Keenan (1985) argued that the maxims of the CP are not universal to language, because there are linguistic communities to which not all of them apply. Also, Grice's CP can help to account for the relationship between sense and force of utterances, and to explain conversational implicatures, the inferences of which result from at least two distinct methods of communication: following or flouting the maxims. But CP alone cannot fully explain how people talk. It can only explain how conversational implicature is given rise to but it does not tell us why people do not say directly what they mean (Leech, 1983). That is, he claims that CP is insufficient to explain the indirectness in conversation. Therefore, he (1983) believed that PP can be seen not just another principle to be added to the CP, but as its necessary complement which rescues the CP from serious trouble.

In the process of College English listening teaching, conversational listening comprehension is quite common and also included in almost various English exams such as CET-4 & 6 and IELTS. This kind of question pattern tests students'

understanding of the details of the conversation, the attitude of the speaker and the conversational implicature of the conversation which is the hardest part for students to figure out. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the texts of conversation in the textbook of “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking”(Book 1), hoping to find CP and PP are widely used in these texts and in turn students can use the two principles for guidance in their listening comprehension.

III Theoretical Framework

CP is associated with four constituent maxims, labeled as quantity, quality, relation and manner, each of which consists of one or more specific sub-maxims. Participants, in short, should speak “sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information” (Grice, 1975). CP, is in essence, a sort of tacit agreement between participants to work together to create a coherent and effective exchange, The maxims of CP are as follows:

The Maxim of Quantity: Give the right amount of information.

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

(Adapted from Grice, 1975)

Politeness is considered to be another level to conversational interaction (Fasold, 2000) and rules of politeness are part of pragmatic competence. People may disobey the cooperative principle for some reasons, and politeness principle, to some extent, can explain why people do not obey the cooperative principle (Chunxia Zhang, 2016).

PP includes six Maxims as follows:

1. Maxim of Tact
 - (a) Minimize cost to other;
 - (b) Maximize benefit to other;
2. Maxim of Generosity
 - (a) Minimize the benefit to self;
 - (b) Maximize the cost to self;
3. Maxim of Approbation
 - (a) Minimize dispraise of others;
 - (b) Maximize praise of others;
4. Maxim of Modesty
 - (a) Minimize praise of self;
 - (b) Maximize dispraise of self;
5. Maxim of Agreement
 - (a) Minimize disagreement between self and others;
 - (b) Maximize agreement between self and others;
6. Maxim of Sympathy
 - (a) Minimize antipathy between self and others;
 - (b) Maximize sympathy between self and others;

IV Research Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Design and Methodology

This paper is a qualitative research, employing document analysis which is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. The paper mainly focuses on CP and PP used in the conversation in the textbook of “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking”(Book 1), involving skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), interpretation and analysis. Content analysis will be used in this process and finally organize information into two categories of CP and PP.

4.2 Research Site

The research is conducted in Guilin, China since it mainly investigates the application of CP and PP in the process of Chinese students’ listening comprehension by analyzing the textbook of “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking”(Book 1) used in Guilin University of Technology in Guilin.

4.3 Selection Criteria and Participants

The Book 1 “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking” is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) which has grown into an important base for foreign language teaching and research in China and a strategic publisher for foreign language publications and a model for China’s publishing “going global”. FLTRP publishes a large number of high-quality teaching materials and academic works, serves tens of millions of primary, secondary and university students and trains more than 100,000 foreign language teachers. New Horizon College English, composed of Reading & Writing, and Viewing, listening & Speaking ranging from level 1 to level 4, has been widely used by the majority of universities in China. Therefore, studying the conversation in the Book 1 “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking” can be very rather meaningful and beneficial to the listening teaching and the enhancement of students’ listening comprehension.

4.4 Data Collection

Data collection consists of three phases: skimming and superficial examination for selecting conversations which use CP and PP; reading thoroughly to find out how these conversations follow CP and PP; finally interpreting and coding data.

4.5 Role of Researcher

In the process of the research, the researcher needs to collect documents related to the research from the Book 1, read them thoroughly, analyze and interpret these documents.

4.6 Methods of Validation

As a research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies—intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1988) also pointed out that documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem. The researcher will skim and then read documents carefully and thoroughly to make sure that data won’t be misinterpreted.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

All documents analyzed in the research are from the Book 1 without changing any contents. The interpreting and coding strictly follow the principles of CP and PP.

4.8 Scope and Limitations

This study only focuses on cooperative principle and politeness principle used in the conversation in the textbook of “New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Speaking”(Book 1) instead of looking into more examples from other sources such as CET 4 &6, IELTS and other English skill tests, which makes the study quite limited. In addition, this study only employs document analysis to analyze texts, and failed to combine with other research methods such as comparative analysis by comparing those who are taught CP and PP in the process of listening comprehension and those who are not taught the two principles in their listening comprehension. Furthermore, texts selected in the research are only a part of the Book 1, which make the study biased.

4.9 Definition of Terms

CET-4----The College English Test, better known as CET, is a national English as a foreign language test in the People's Republic of China. It examines the English proficiency of undergraduate and postgraduate students in China. It includes CET-4 and CET-6. The CET-4 is mandatory for university students in China who are not English majors. It is also a prerequisite for a Bachelor's degree. Many employers in China prefer applicants with CET-4 or even CET-6 certification. Both CET-4 and CET-6 include 4 parts, namely, listening, reading, writing and translation.

Conversational implicature---In pragmatics, conversational implicature is an indirect or implicit speech act: what is meant by a speaker's utterance that is not part of what is explicitly said. The term is also known simply as implicature; it is the antonym (opposite) of explicature, which is an explicitly communicated assumption (Richard, 2020).

Generalized implicature refers to the implicature obtained from the speaker's utterance when the speaker observes the cooperative principle and its maxims.

Particularized implicature refers to the speaker violates certain maxim of the cooperative principle and forces the listener to infer the meaning according to the specific context.

V Findings and Discussion

In the Book 1, listening comprehension is composed of short conversations, long conversations and passages. After reading carefully both short conversations and long conversations, the researcher found that these conversations either follow CP or follow PP by violating CP as reflected by the following examples:

1) Man: Hi, honey! Why not go to the cinema? There is a new movie on this evening.

Woman: Oh, really? I'll go get the keys.

Question: What can we learn from the woman?

2) Man: Mary, have you seen Lily yet? I'm looking for her for a long while, but can't find her anywhere?

Woman: You know what? The light in her room was on just a moment ago.

Question: What does the woman mean?

Both 1) and 2) violate the Maxim of Quantity. In the first conversation, the woman failed to make her information as informative as is required. She didn't mention directly whether she was willing to watch the movie or not. Instead, she replied that she would go get the keys, from which we can infer the particularized implicature that she is going outside to watch the movie with the man. In the second conversation, the woman didn't answer directly where Lily is, instead, she said that the light in her room was on just a moment ago, from which the particularized implicature that Mary might be in her room can be figured out. Obviously, this conversation not only violates Maxim of Quantity but also the Maxim of Relation. Usually violation of the Maxim of Relation is associated with violation of the Maxim of Quantity. They often happen simultaneously.

3) Man: Linda, do you plan to buy the pirated CD? It is really cheap.

Woman: well, Tom, what do you mean? Do I look like a thief?

4) Woman: Lucy told me the other day she might become a famous movie star.

Man: Yes, and pigs might fly.

3) and 4) violate the Maxim of Quality. In the third conversation, when the man asked the woman whether she planned to buy the pirated CD, the woman used rhetorical question and an exaggerated figure of speech to indicate that she was not going to buy it. In the fourth conversation, the man indicated that the woman couldn't become a movie star in an exaggerated and ironic fashion. When speakers use rhetorical device such as exaggeration, rhetorical question and irony to communicate, the communicative intention doesn't lie in the literal meaning, instead, listeners need to infer the implicature.

5) Man: What do you think of the movie we saw last night?

Woman: I should have stayed at home.

6) Woman: I'm doing a research about North Korea, I heard you lived there.

Man: Oh, well, but I was a little boy at the time.

5) and 6) violate the Maxim of Relation. It seems that the question and the answer in the two conversations are not related to each other. In the fifth conversation, the man asked the woman about her idea about the movie they saw last night, but the woman

replied that she should have stayed at home, from which we can deduce the particularized implicature that the movie is not good.

In the six conversation, the woman asked the man about the North Korea, the man just replied that he was a little boy at that time, which means that he couldn't give any information about the country. Of course, the man also violated the Maxim of Quantity.

7) Man: You know what? Jessica is going to attend this party. She is the most pretty women I've ever know.

Woman: Well, I wouldn't vote for her if she participates in a beauty contest.

8)Man: Sophie, how about coming over to have a dinner with me tonight?

Woman: I'd love to, but I'm really exhausted. I stay up till 4 o'clock this morning, because my term paper is due.

7) and 8) violate the Maxim of Quantity, their answer is more than what is required but all follow PP. In the seventh conversation, the woman followed PP by using the Maxim of Approbation and tried to minimize dispraise of the man. In the eighth conversation, the woman followed PP by using the Maxim of Tact and said more information as required in order to show her politeness for refusing the man's invitation.

9) A: Can I ask you about your evening class? What class do you go to?

B: Car Maintenance.

A: What night of the week is it on?

B: Wednesday night.

A: And how long does it last?

B: Well, it's supposed to start at 6, but that's a bit of problem because people have difficulty getting through the traffic. So we start at 6:30 and then it goes on until 9 o'clock.

A: And what your reason for wanting to do the class?

B: Well, I just bought my first car and I don't know anything about cars.

This conversation is between a student and a receptionist of a training school. The receptionist asked the student a few questions such as what subject he or she has interest, what time for class, how long the class last and the learning objective. The student replied respectively without giving unnecessary or unrelated information. Thus, both the student and the receptionist strictly follow the Maxim of Relation and Quantity and it is very easy for listeners to find out the generalized implicature of this conversation.

From the above conversations, it is obvious that only a few conversations follow CP, which is very easy for students to figure out the generalized implicature that is self-evident and doesn't require students to make inference. Thus, generally speaking, students can choose the right answer when they listen to this kind of conversation. Nevertheless, most of conversations violate CP, which requires listeners to make inference about the particularized implicature. This is the hardest part of listening comprehension for Chinese students who find it difficult to decide whether speakers are conveying hidden meanings. But the particularized implicature can better indicate students' listening ability, which is why we can find more conversations violating CP in the listening books, English Skill Tests such as CET 4&6 and IELTS. Furthermore, some conversations violate CP just to follow PP as shown in the seventh and eighth conversation, but some not. PP is only added to CP as a supplement. Thus, in order to help students to enhance their listening ability and achieve high points in their English tests, it is necessary to teach students CP and PP and use them to analyze conversations they hear.

VI Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Summary of the Studies

English language teaching should attach great importance to students' comprehensive ability of English application, especially listening and speaking ability should be first developed. However, Chinese students perform poorly in listening comprehension. Thus, this study uses the document analysis to interpret and code conversation texts in the Book 1 "New Horizon College English: Viewing, Listening & Viewing" in order to find CP and PP used in conversations.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The result shows that more conversations in the book violate CP, sometimes violating only one Maxim but sometimes violating two maxims together such as Maxim of Relation and Quantity. This is because violation of the Maxim of Relation is usually associated with violation of the Maxim of Quantity and they often happen simultaneously. A few conversations violate CP just to follow PP.

6.3 Limitations

This research only uses document analysis, which may make the result subjective and biased. Also, the documents studied in the research are only from Book 1 without covering the whole set of book. Last, the research fails to give detailed explanation when discussing conversations which violate CP and requires inference, namely, explain how to figure out particularized implicature.

6.4 Conclusion

With the further deepening of China's College English Teaching reform, the educational circle believe that more attention should be paid to the functional teaching of language and the cultivation of students' English application ability. Shouren Wang (2009), the chairman of Advisory Committee of Foreign Language Teaching in Colleges and Universities of the Ministry of Education of China, claimed that the theoretical research and empirical research should be combined in the college foreign language research projects, which can promote the theory and practice of college foreign language teaching to a higher level. By making full use of CP and PP, students can quickly deduce the implicit meaning of conversation, that is, conversational implicature, so as to clear the barriers of listening comprehension and achieve the purpose of improving their communicative competence.

6.5 Recommendations

In Pragmatics, CP and PP are quite useful to analyze the conversational implicature of conversation. Thus, the two principles can be used not only in English listening teaching but also in oral English since many Chinese students fail to master listening and speaking ability well.

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